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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Long a primary corridor in the street plan for the District of Columbia, South Capitol Street has always been envisioned as a gateway to the city and its Monumental Core. Looking at a map, North, East, and South Capitol Streets, plus the Mall, provide four clear, direct vistas of the Capitol from different vantages, and each of the four should reflect that reality when viewed from the ground instead of a map. South Capitol Street particularly should reflect that reality, since it is a primary link between the Monumental Core and the neighborhoods of Anacostia and Prince George's County.

Unfortunately, for those who really know the City and its neighborhoods, South Capitol Street has also become a symbol of neglect and underdevelopment. While much of South Capitol Street has been converted to an urban freeway, and remains a primary approach to the United States Capitol and Washington's Monumental Core, the street's present characteristics and condition are not appropriate to its central place and important function. Perhaps most importantly, South Capitol Street has become a conduit for through traffic at the expense of serving the immediate needs of the residents and businesses in the corridor, and therefore it no longer supports the economic development and quality of life of the City.

South Capitol Street needs to be fixed.

FIXING THE PROBLEM

To address and correct the problem, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT) has performed two studies to identify improvements in the South Capitol Street corridor. The first, the South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study (The Gateway Study), created a vision for transforming South Capitol Street from an unsightly freeway into a grand urban gateway.

Performed at the direction of the United States Congress, the Gateway Study was “a study of methods to make improvements to promote commercial, recreational, and residential activities and to improve pedestrian and vehicular access on South Capitol Street and the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge between Independence Avenue and the Suitland Parkway, and on New Jersey Avenue between Independence Avenue and M Street Southeast in Washington, DC.” The study reviewed the corridor's history, examined its present conditions, developed improvement concepts, estimated their costs, and identified implementation steps. The study proposed that South Capitol Street would become a gracious urban boulevard that would accommodate bicycles, pedestrians, and transit vehicles, as well as automobiles and commerce. The study proposed constructing a new Frederick Douglass



One view from The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study vision

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Memorial Bridge on a new alignment, lower and more urban in scale than the present bridge. A report, *The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study*, was completed and delivered to Congress in 2003.

Building upon this vision, the second study, the Anacostia Access Study, developed options for improvements at specific locations in the corridor. To design these options, the Anacostia Access Study analyzed additional information on traffic flow, pedestrian and bicyclist patterns, and transit facilities and services. The study further considered how best to establish the urban form appropriate to a gateway and to create linkages to the corridor's parks and public open space. Special attention was given to a new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge. More-detailed engineering design consideration was applied to potential improvements, a constructability analysis addressed the process of building them, and refined cost estimates were developed. The study also defined near-term improvements that could be built quickly.

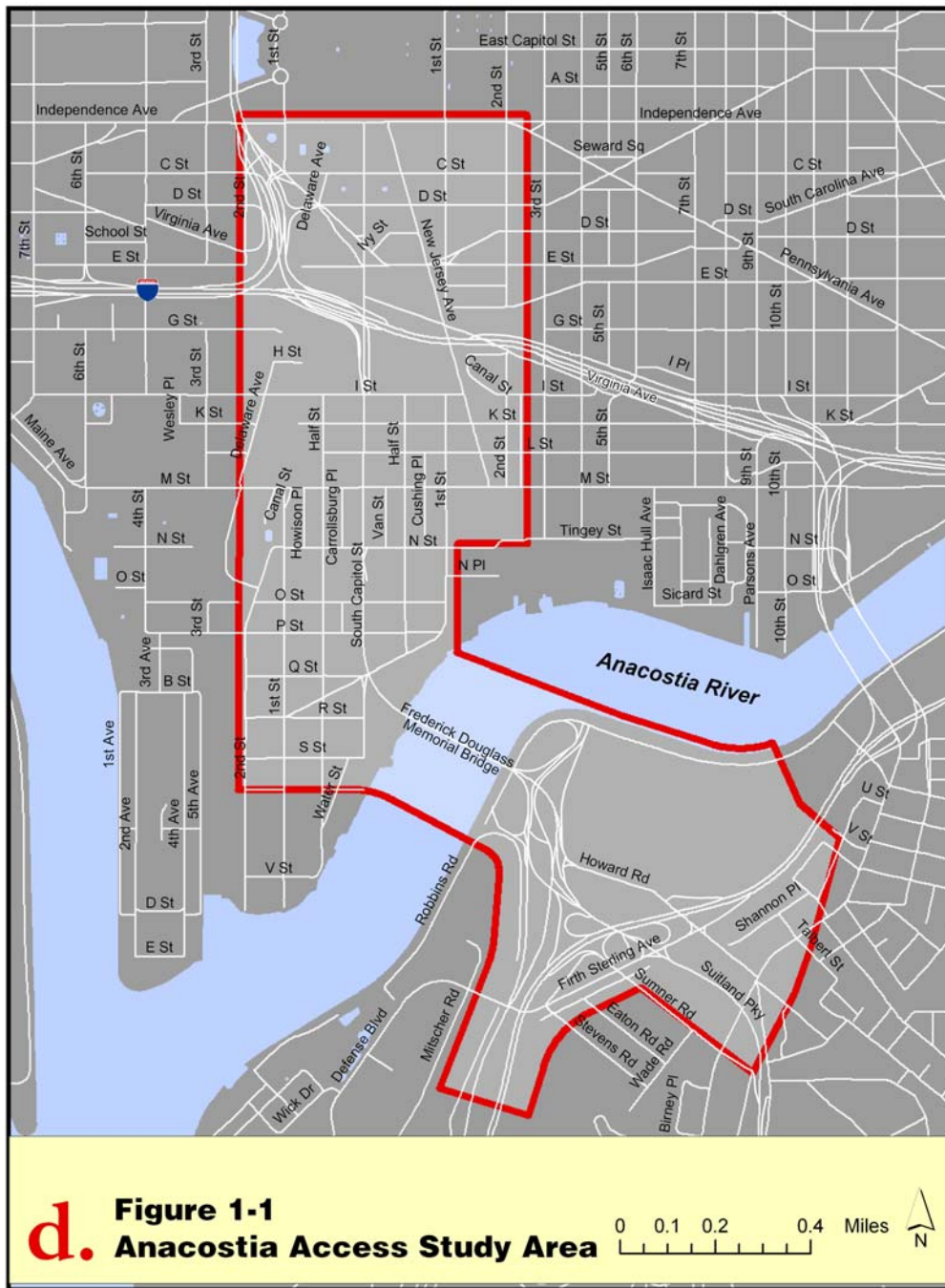
Together, the two studies are the basis for major changes in the corridor. This report consolidates the findings and recommendations from both studies, and includes an Implementation concept to help guide the continuation of the process. It includes technical information that supported the creation of the vision in *The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study*, and it describes the analysis and the results from the Anacostia Access Study.

STUDY AREA

Depicted in Figure 1–1 on the following page, the South Capitol Gateway study area comprises portions of the southeast and southwest quadrants of Washington, DC. It includes South Capitol Street from Independence Avenue to Suitland Parkway and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue. It also includes New Jersey Avenue from Independence Avenue to M Street, SE.

The study area is surrounded by a variety of urban development and land uses. North of the study area is the United States Capitol and grounds. East of the study area are the Capitol Hill and Lincoln Park neighborhoods and Near Southeast/Navy Yard commercial office centers. South of the study area are the Congress Heights and Washington Highlands neighborhoods, United States Naval Reservation, Bolling Air Force Base, and Prince Georges County, Maryland. West of the study area is Washington channel and marina, East Potomac Park, and Fort McNair. The Anacostia River runs through the study area.

The study area consists mostly of industrial and commercial development with some residential development primarily west of South Capitol Street and east of New Jersey Avenue, SE. The study area also contains major transportation facilities including the Southeast-Southwest Freeway (I-395-I-295) and the I-295 and Suitland Parkway interchange.



OVERALL STUDY FINDINGS

The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study and the Anacostia Access Study demonstrated several important facts that support continued planning and development of transportation improvements in the corridor:

The Overall Goal—An Impressive Urban Gateway to the City. South Capitol Street must become an appropriate gateway to the United States Capitol and Washington’s Monumental Core. Transportation improvements can be designed with the necessary functional and aesthetic characteristics to support this goal, and with careful and sensitive design and coordination with the residents and business interests in the corridor, they can also become a generator of economic development.

Immediate Action Objectives. Events are moving forward rapidly in the South Capitol Gateway corridor, and in the overall AWI region of the City. To keep pace with development initiatives and the needs of the residents and business interests, transportation and infrastructure actions must be initiated and implemented quickly.

The Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge will soon need to be replaced, requiring several years of planning, design, and construction before ribbon-cutting. Delays in this process would force more expensive repairs and perhaps even closing the bridge to traffic, as well as backing up the entire development process.

Redevelopment is occurring in the corridor, and transportation system improvements must be defined in advance of this redevelopment. New buildings must be designed to complement reconfigured transportation facilities, and new development must not occupy land where these transportation facilities will be built.

Transportation system continuity must be maintained. South Capitol Street is a vital transportation system link, contributing to the Washington region’s social and economic health. South Capitol Street also provides access among the military installations in the study area, fulfilling a larger national homeland security and national security role.

Implementation Priorities. Detailing the implementation details of the Immediate Action Objectives will take a focus on multiple improvements and activities. Included in this list are:

- **An urban boulevard.** South Capitol Street will become a grand urban boulevard throughout the existing 130-foot street section west of the Anacostia River. This six-lane boulevard will include various combinations of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements while also handling current and future traffic volumes. Trees and landscaping will make South Capitol Street a pleasant and attractive place for people to live, work, and move about.
- **A new bridge.** A new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge will serve as both the aesthetic and functional bond between the banks of the Anacostia River. An entirely new design for the bridge will allow it to be lower, more urban in scale, more suitable for multimodal travel, and more appropriate in massing and architectural detail than the current structure. The new bridge’s improved alignment will dramatically improve the vista toward the U.S. Capitol and the Monumental Core from the Anacostia River. The bridge’s new location will also present new opportunities for public parks, monuments, and memorials along both banks of the river.
- **Reconfigured Poplar Point.** The South Capitol Street-Suitland Parkway-I-295 interchange on Poplar Point will be radically changed to improve traffic safety and improve access to the Anacostia River. Reconfiguring the transportation infrastructure will free up 20 acres of land currently

consumed by roadways. This will foster economic development while also creating new opportunities for public open space and parks.

- **Expanded transit.** Investing in transit is critical to accommodating future travel demands, which will inevitably increase from new development in the region and along the corridor. Expanding this system should include increasing Metrorail Green Line trains, improving access to Green Line stations, introducing light rail lines, supporting commuter bus lines, improving local bus services, building a new and expanded Metrobus garage in this part of the city, and facilitating intermodal transfer.
- **Economic development.** Improvements to South Capitol Street will encourage mixed-use development, both along the corridor and in adjacent neighborhoods. Creating the new South Capitol Gateway will not disrupt the neighborhoods, as it appears not to require the purchase of any private residences because existing street right-of-way can largely accommodate the needed transportation facilities.
- **Neighborhood connections.** Changes to South Capitol Street will improve the connections to and between neighborhoods on both sides of the Anacostia River. Removing physical barriers, connecting streets, and adding new sidewalks and bikeways in the South Capitol Street corridor will allow safer and more convenient accessibility.
- **Parks, open space, monuments, and memorials.** Transportation improvements will be the catalyst for the creation of new parks and open spaces, not only by reducing the intrusion of roadways but also by creating a new framework for organizing space in the corridor. These changes will create new places for monuments and memorials. Areas along the river as well as the vacant and underutilized properties on the east side of South Capitol Street present opportunities.
- **The broader context.** While South Capitol Street will become an appropriate gateway, its relationships to other transportation facilities in the Anacostia Waterfront must also be considered. Changing the character of South Capitol Street will affect the demands placed on the other Anacostia River crossings. Improving South Capitol Street will still leave the Southeast-Southwest Freeway and the elevated railroad tracks as visual and physical barriers across the corridor. Regional growth will add more through traffic. These issues require the continued planning for other changes, including bridge modifications and a tunnel to accommodate through trips.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Throughout the planning for South Capitol Street, DDOT has maintained a continuing discussion with neighbors and others who are interested in the future of the study area. During The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study, DDOT held four public meetings and also met with Advisory Neighborhood Commissions and other civic organizations. A project website was created, and meeting materials and project information were available there.

The Anacostia Access Study was part of a broader multi-agency public involvement process. By the time the study began, several planning and development efforts were underway in the area. Holding independent public meetings would have made them too frequent and confusing, placing an unfair burden on those interested in staying involved and reducing the meetings' effectiveness. Instead, DDOT worked with the DC Office of Planning, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the DC Water and Sewer Authority, and other agencies to hold consolidated public meetings that covered multiple projects.

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Five public meetings using the name Trans~Forming Anacostia were held between November 5, 2003 and June 15, 2004. Meetings were organized to focus on the most pressing issues at a given time and to reflect the relationships among different projects. DDOT presented information not only on the Anacostia Access Study but also on the Anacostia Gateway Study, the Ward Eight Traffic Calming Study, and the Middle Anacostia River Transportation Crossings Study. The District of Columbia Office of Planning discussed the Anacostia Transit-Area Strategic Investment and Development Plan, and related information was provided on Main Street Anacostia and school, library, and other construction. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority described the Anacostia Light Rail Demonstration Project, DC's Transit Future alternatives analysis, and the Anacostia Metrorail Station Access Study. The DC Water and Sewer Authority presented its plans for sewer construction and low-impact development solutions in Historic Anacostia.

In addition to the other public involvement activities, DDOT also held a series of Bridge Workshops. The Anacostia Access Study began the bridge design and project development process through a two-day workshop on March 30-31, 2004. The goal of this workshop was to provide a fresh look at the bridge in the light of detailed engineering and technical information produced in The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study and the Anacostia Access Study. Stakeholders, the design team, and local architecture students convened to develop potential bridge concepts.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

At the beginning of The South Capitol Gateway and Corridor Improvement Study, DDOT recognized that many local, regional, and federal agencies would have crucial roles in designing, approving, and building improvements in the corridor. Creating consensus about the improvements required that these agencies be informed and participate in decision-making throughout planning and project development.

DDOT created an interagency coordination process to meet this need. DDOT invited representatives of affected agencies to an initial meeting on September 12, 2002. The group agreed to meet monthly to share information on project progress, seek comments on decisions, and provide for coordination with other projects and studies in the area. These monthly meetings have continued and will continue into the future to support further planning, environmental studies, and design.

Similar to public involvement, interagency coordination expanded to include multiple projects, and the list of participating agencies has grown to the following:

- DC Department of Transportation
- DC Office of Planning
- Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development
- DC Department of Health
- DC Department of Housing and Community Development
- DC Department of Parks and Recreation
- DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6D
- National Capital Revitalization Corporation
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- Washington DC Water and Sewer Authority

- Federal Highway Administration
- National Capital Planning Commission
- Commission of Fine Arts
- Architect of the Capitol
- United States Navy
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- National Park Service
- U.S. General Services Administration
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Maryland Department of Transportation